Letter from Taizé

Preparing the Council of Youth

N° 6 May 1971

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Letter from the Prior

For us, receiving so many young people at Easter meant the partial demolition of the facade of the church. Although the decision was made quickly, it was not an easy one for a community that loves this place of daily prayer. It led me to say yet again to my brothers : What lies before us will be a call to flexibility and to adaptations which, although unsuspected, will be made possible through our common life.

The second year of the preparation for the Council of Youth will be marked by the poverty of our means, and accepting the limitations that result from this. Without gold or silver, going forward with simple means of expression. Is inefficacy not efficacious when it impels man to be free from every pressure and from every human domination ? Moving forward also with the faith that we have, this little faith that no-one can ever capitalise.

your brother Roger

Holy week at Taizé : young people : 1.500 on the Monday ; 4.500 Friday ; 6.500 Saturday. From forty different countries. Arriving by car, by train, hitch-hiking. A group of them controlling the trafic — endless lines of parked cars snaking their way along the country lanes, everybody finishing the climb up the hill on foot.

Three hundred men and girls, already here for several days, divided into teams for washing dishes, cooking, information, registration, parking...

A tent-amphitheatre joined on to the facade of the church, the walls having been knocked down. One nave in canvas, one nave in concrete : a single, huge church. The community at the meeting point of the two naves.

Tyniec (Tenietz), « the yellow house by the bells », open day and night, a place to meet, for a hot drink. People sleeping in tents, in dormitories, some even in the church.

By the large numbers the reality of the preparation of the council of youth could really be seen. Exchanges in groups, then long periods of silence favoured personal reflexion.

From Easter Tuesday a second meeting began : 1.500 new arrivals looking for ways of putting into effect the essential features of the second stage.

At the heart of these days : the common prayer, the night of continuous prayer, the great celebration of Easter morning with the life commitment of a brother and an appeal from brother Roger to all those preparing the council of youth (text p. 8 and 9).

Easter afternoon, brother Roger and an intercontinental team expressed the general line of reflexion for the coming months — summed up in the following text :

The Risen Christ is going to prepare us to give our life so that man be no longer victim of man.

Giving ones life

After a year of exploring the meaning of the *festival* that the Risen Christ comes to quicken in the innermost heart of man, we know that there is nothing euphoric about it. It implies a *struggle* to let all men have part in that same liberating festival.

This year, as a direct result, we shall consider how the Risen Christ is urging us *to follow this through to the end :* « He is preparing us to *give our life* so that man be no longer victim of man ».

That means yet again an *interior adventure* for this year : « Giving our life », not just a part, but the whole of our life, and throughout our entire existence. Preparing ourselves for this in diverse ways :

within oneself,
in cells,
and by a host of other means...

« ... so that man be no longer victim of man », whatever be the form of *interior or exterior* oppression that weighs him down.

Becoming conscious of oppressions.
Committing our energies to breaking with situations where man is victim of man.
Rejecting privileges.
Refusing the hunt for success.
Farthering communion between man.
Finding liberation, our own and our neighbour's, near and far away.
Being released ourselves so as to secure others' release.

Together, imagining concrete means of living out these realities, with a great *multiplicity of expressions* and according to each one's various commitments in : professional — Church — and political life.

In the course of this last year we have discovered that between us we have such a range of *diverse aspirations* that we are all the more attentive to one point where there is unanimity of faith :

Our common celebration of the Risen Christ.

Bearers of news

In preparing to give our life because of Christ, we are bearers of news to all men, without any segregation whatsoever. So that this may be passed on from one to another, to go out to tell those around us, that little by little it may bring back to life to all that is inert among Christians, we are still situated

in the hidden underground movement of the Church.

We are being led to live *incognito*
like leaven hidden in the dough,
like the seed buried in the ground,
seeking *poverty of heart,*
always using *poor means,*
without gold or silver.

An enormous diversity

In the midst of a large crowd it is easy to feel lonely. The « white pebble » worn by many is the sign that, in spite of the large numbers, each one is loved and known personally, called by his name, marked with a new name that he alone knows (Revelation 2. 17). For several hours each day, as a sign of that, there were some forty priests and brothers in the church, giving everybody the opportunity to be listened — to on his own for a moment. That is one of the main discoveries of this Easter meeting and one that will remain during other meetings.

If the common prayer is the point at which the unanimity of all is expressed, the extreme diversity of the aspirations of the young people who come to Taizé was obvious as never before. There are inevitably tensions. For example, many had written asking to be allowed to speak during the meeting : one wanting to profit from the large crowd to launch a new movement, another desiring to impart an experience which had been vital for him, others wanting the meeting to make political declarations — at times, moreover, in diametrically differing directions. It is only normal that people should want to use such a huge eassembly as a springboard. It would have needed more than 24 hours in a day for all the diversity to be expressed.

The theme of the coming months, « to prepare oneself to give ones life that man be no longer victim of man », will be tackled from an angle which was strongly emphasised by the inter-continental team when it had to comment on the preceding text : giving one's life. It is an interior adventure. Not the publication of declarations, not pronouncing condemnations, signing motions. We are not at conclusions, we are preparing a council of youth.

But asking the question : how to prepare to give one's life ? In the likeness of young people today, the gift of one's life for men is realised in a great plurality of commitments, ranging from the person who reckons that he has to chose revolution to the one who decides to enter a monastery.

Since 1966, during the successive meetings at Taizé, we have always used more or less the same method. This summer we shall look for new ways. For a few hours every day, the eating and sleeping tents will be used for various projects, expressing a pluralism : one tent where the talk will be of political action and conscientisation ; one tent where we shall try to be attentive to the southern hemisphere ; a tent for a reflexion on vocation ; tents for various forms of expression — music, eurythmic, sculpture, theatre, etc.

An extra field will be arranged for the use of those who are particularly looking for silence. There will be a large tent set aside for reading, meditation and prayer. It will also be possible to pitch individual tents on this field.

A year's searching, and slowly a whole way of living has emerged for those preparing for the council of youth :

The *cells* have marked the first year, as being a means allowing a few together to share in depth. They will continue, but this year other, more varied means are going to be imagined.

The *interior adventure*, going down to the hidden movement of the Church, remains characteristic of our undertaking — there has even been talk of « clandestinity ». It is as Pierino — the union-member from Milan — said : « The important thing is to live out a concrete commitment. If someone asks me why I am doing that,

it is only then that I tell them ». To be a « bearer of news » means firstly bearing it within oneself.

Our *language* should also be marked with this same discretion, this incognito. Everyone is asked that, temporarily, until the autumn, the expression « joyful news » should vanish from our vocabulary — these two words might become a cliché. « News » is sufficient.

To live the *festival* of the risen Christ will remain the deep inspiration underlying the whole preparation for the council of youth, even if we are brought to a new search, to a new theme. Throughout the meetings this summer there will always be, especially for those coming to Taizé for the first time, a part of reflexion about festival, running parallel to the new theme.

One conviction is more and more confirmed : everything that we undertake will be carried out with *poor means*. Going from friend to friend. As at the beginning of the Church, discrete visits to young and to old. Copying out by hand on a piece of paper a text drawn from the « Letter from Taizé », or from the revue « Fêtes et Saisons » on the council of youth, to give it to a friend. Travelling to distant countries by bicycle. These are some of the means...

The Risen Christ sets us in communion one with another and that is already the Church. He is in us. But, also, we look towards him : Christ exists in and for himself. He it is whom we have looked for, everywhere and all together, sometimes we have also left him aside. We may abandon him, he never gives us up and such is his attachment to man that it is he who still waits and looks for us.

And then, this last year, filled for so very many of us with the spirit of festival, the movement of withdrawal away from Christ and his Body, the Church, has ever increased in speed : young people, but also a withdrawal by priests, pastors.

All through the world, could we continue to live the festival of the Risen Christ and the struggle that that implies, upheld as we are by the preparation of a Council of Youth, and then at the same time turn away our faces, remain indifferent in the presence of these withdrawals?

The words that I am going to pronounce now are not easy to say. I hesitated for a long time. But I should be wanting in courage if I remained silent. I recall that by my vocation I am a free man and that freedom is paid for dearly in a human existence.

Listen : the present crisis of confidence in man tears away from their identity many of those who had said « yes » to priesthood. Some are bewildered, they no longer know what use they are. So where is the essential in the priestly vocation? I see three main lines running through it, which are specific to the vocation : firstly, the man who is priest practises, all his life long, listening, sounding the depths. Then he brings liberation to man, unbinding on earth the things that will at once be unbound before Christ. And all that so as to give man life by the Risen Christ in the Eucharist — Christ, our essential love, our first love.

from brother Roger

We who struggle within ourselves for Christ's sake and the Gospel's struggle because we are fragile, vulnerable, how could we demand that the men of ministry be supermen and not simply men limited as we are?

Faced with the loneliness of men who have received a priestly call, do we realise that, isolated, without you, without us, they cannot live their ministry? Their isolation is a question for us all : What can we do, we who, far away or here at Taizé, are making ourselves ready for that reality of the Church that the Council of Youth will one day be? What can we do for them?

My certainty : together we can accomplish what, a year ago, we reckoned impossible.

I then ask you : In the name of Christ do not leave them given over to solitude, bring them your trust, through the ministry of forgiveness search to receive a heart which is poor, reconciled, unified by Jesus Christ. Do not be miserly with your trust, otherwise, no festival for them.

Some say that there are bad pastors. When it is so, let us keep silence..., or else, some fear a Church that might make use of us, or, at least, might retain us from a commitment that man be no longer victim of man.

There, we are already given just what is necessary to go beyond our fears and to begin to carry the spirit of festival into the Body of Christ, the Church.

The Church : Called ever to purify herself to become a place of communion for all men, devoid of means of power, set free to run towards the essential, the Church will be recognised, through you, by its spirit of festival, the spirit of the Risen Lord.

(Sermon given on Easter sunday morning)

IN EVERY CONTINENT

Comings and goings, arrivals and departures — more and more journeys, in all the continents. Sometimes, it being always a problem to finance them, journeys already arranged for various reasons are prolonged or otherwise profited from.

LATIN AMERICA

This year as last, Margarita was able to stop off in various countries on the way to Taizé. Above all she looked for ways of preparing the council of youth in Latin America, reflecting with the national responsibles of youth from seven different countries around the theme of « liberation ».

A couple from France, disposing of two free months because of a change in their situation, was able to make a visit of friendship in South America. They came back with numerous impressions :

« *Very young, it is necessary to work to survive. There is a direct passage into the adult world, without the stage of adolescence. The system needs them because they produce more than those who are older and they cost less. This youth has no say, but is reduced to silence. The youth of Europe must hear and understand this silence.*

» *In Brazil we met that kind of youth, in Mexico it was rather those from the faculties : they are aware of the situation of oppression in which their country is evoluing, their desire is for a new world where man can be man. With them we spoke about the council of youth.*

» *Clearly, the things undertaken by young Latino-Americans and by Europeans cannot be identical. The council is first a long march — the starting points are*

far apart, the routes different. What is longed for is the creation and encounters of small cells from the two sides of the Atlantic. They are seen as the best way of ensuring this reciprocal and mutual acceptance. Are we not all, rich and poor, subjected? And do not we too, in our domain, have to discover the sense and means of liberation? »

NORTH AMERICA

Several meetings during the winter in the States : Chicago, Texas, Alabama, New York, Washington.

« *What struck us most, with our formalist mentalities, was the enormous spontaneity of the young. A very serious discussion would suddenly be interrupted by a couple of songs or even some exercises. It is easy to talk of festival and celebration in the States, it is a current theme. It is harder to talk of festival which is a struggle and not an escape.*

The black in northern parts of the United States no longer wishes to be white, because "black is beautiful". He takes a lot of trouble to show that by this "Afro" clothes and hair. He is no longer afraid of speaking — that was the source of a confrontation lasting several hours during a meeting at Chicago, for example. When a little comprehension was finally established between black and white, everybody began to dance for joy!

» *Texas offers quite a different face of America. The terms of the racial question are changed by the presence of young Mexicans. One Mexican girl said :* "All the books about the Mexicans of America have been written by whites who take no account of the mentality of the people itself. To continue my studies I am obliged, on an intellectual plane, to become white".

» *We had been invited to Alabama by a multi-racial group involved in the movement for black liberation. We lived in the huts of the inhabitants — formerly slaves.*

Since the end of cotton-growing the whites have left and the unskilled blacks are left. In a cooperative, far from the big towns, there was no need to talk of festival — there was one prepared for us by the inhabitants — a meal, songs, poems. The climax of this festival was the celebration of the eucharist, with the rhythm of the songs of the black participants and of long free prayers. From the road we were watched from police cars.

» Blacks, Porto-Ricans and also some whites, a few of those who have begun the preparation of the council of youth in the United States, will be coming to Taizé this summer.»

ASIA

A whole range of possibilities has been opened by a journey of four months through Asia and Australia. In India, many contacts with young groups, christian and not. Presence of prayer and friendship in Vietnam ; a visit to young people in Thailand. And even in Australia, so cut off, there is a preparation under way as elsewhere.

Nicole, Christine and a second Nicole left straight after Easter for a year's living in common in the Lebanon, with a halt of a few days in Greece on the way. They will stay in the Lebanon but anticipate possible journeys to visit young people in other countries of the Middle East.

AFRICA

Hélène, Marianne and Marie-Claude have ended their stay in the Cameroon (see the account in *Communion* 1971/1). They have now gone to live in Congo-Kinshasa. Having shared for several months the living conditions of a popular quarter of Douala, they assembled for Easter young people from several African countries as well as a few Europeans :

« This meeting was the occasion for a good number of discoveries. There was the discovery of a community

life — inter-racial, inter-tribal and also inter-social with, side by side, young students, workers and unemployed. Ecumenical as well : for some it was the first opportunity of assisting at the eucharist of another confession. It offered a chance of reflecting on a continuing commitment.»

EUROPE

Between the autumn of last year and this coming summer, cells of young folk will have visited all the countries of Europe. Sometimes in silence, in the subterranean movement of the Church ... these cells are formed of two girls and two boys of varied nationalities. Margarita will not be going back to Argentina between Easter and July, so that she too can go to visit young people in several countries.

January. Two girls and a boy, joined by a fourth person who had just lived six months in the far North of Norway, go and visit young groups in Sweden, as well as spending a few days in Finland and stopping in Denmark.

January - February. A new journey all through Italy, including Sicily and Sardinia. A few people are preparing a more prolonged presence in the South.

February : Holland. March : West France (Brittany, Vendée, Bordeaux). Also in March : Southern Germany, mainly Wurtemberg. May : Spain and Portugal. Also in May : Switzerland. June : a cell in Great Britain, another in North Germany and in Denmark, a third in German Switzerland and in Austria.

Since, for Europe, there are no other meetings preparing the council of youth beside those of Taizé, and since there are also no structures of organisation, these frequent journeys are the way of maintaining a communion between everybody.

INTERNATIONAL MEETINGS THIS SUMMER

The international meetings preparing the council of youth will run from the Monday evening to the Sunday midday of each week from June 28 to September 12. For the young people unable to give a whole week, shorter meetings will run during the following dates : August 5 through 8, August 26 through 29, September 9 through 12. They will join on the Thursday the others already here since the Monday.

Inscriptions : To facilitate the preparations it is necessary to inscribe before-hand, using the form to be cut out on the last page. If you receive no word from us, you may be sure that your registration has been accepted. For those coming in groups, please complete one form per person.

Participants : Young people from 18 to 29 years of age, including married couples. Each one inscribes for one week only. For each meeting attempts will be made to ensure an equal number of girls and boys.

Costs : Left to each one's responsibility (suggested price, per day, including meals : 1.70 Dollars USA ; 68 p.) Those who can do so give more so as to help pay for others.

Accommodation : In individual tents or in tent-dormitories. Very simple conditions. Everyone brings his own sleeping material, and, if possible, a tent.

Reception and animation teams : Volonteers for both asked to write as soon as possible. They will be expected at Taizé two days before the start of the meeting in question, by the Friday evening.

Simultaneous translation : During every meeting there will be simultaneous translation into all the languages necessary. Discussion groups will be formed according to the linguistic possibilities of each participant ; the week of 19-24 july will probably have English as its principal language.

Individual retreat : The meeting can be extended by a time of silence and solitude — at Taizé, in nearby villages and in the women's communities of the region.

A part from the international youth meetings, other meetings will take place : for young people between 15 and 17, and for married couples. Please write for details.

CHARTER FLIGHT : A large number of young Americans have indicated their intention of taking part in the summer meetings. A charter flight, New York - Paris, has been arranged, leaving New York july 11. Return to the US arranged on a weekly basis. Those wishing details of this flight, contact : *Brother Frank,* 119 W. Locust Street, Chicago, 60610, Ill.; Tel.: (312) 642-8590.

For the U.S.A. :

A Dollars 2.00 contribution is requested from those who receive the « Letter from Taizé » to defray publication expenses and postage :
« Letter from Taizé »,
2150 Almaden Road, 114,
San Jose, Ca. 95125. U.S.A.

We are looking for a young electrician, able to spend a long time here this summer, to look after the simultaneous translation system.

Please tell us if you change your address or if there is an improvement to be made in your present address.

Dir., Réd., Adm. Communauté de Taizé — D.L. : n° 329 — 2e tr. 1971

An essential means of understanding and helping others to understand the preparation of the Council of Youth

A 36 page, English-French illustrated text has just come out :

THE COUNCIL OF YOUTH

1.60 F. (postage included)

MAILED, on payment to *CCP LYON* 486-53

Presses de Taizé, 71 - Taizé-Community (France)

Registration form : SUMMER 1971

Please fill in this form and return it to :

International Youth Meeting, F - 71-Taizé-Community

Please print : CAPITALS. *Please, book in advance.*

NAME : ..... First Name : .....

FULL ADDRESS : .....

..... ZIP CODE : .....

Year of Birth : ..... Job/Profession : .....

Wishes to take part in the meeting, from Monday/Thursday ..... till Sunday .....

Will bring a tent, with ..... places available.

Wishes a place in a dormitory (the number of places is limited).

Wishes to take part in the reception and animation of the meeting and will arrive on the Friday preceding that meeting.

Can take part in discussion groups in : French — German — English — Italian — Spanish — or : .....

Would like to help with simultaneous translation from French into : .....

Wishes to receive ..... extra registration forms.